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Summary record of the 41st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 2 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Saran (Vice-Chair)

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Ms. Saran, Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Fifth periodic report of France (E/C.12/FRA/5; E/C.12/FRA/QPR/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of France joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Borione** (France), introducing her country's fifth periodic report, said that human rights were at the heart of the French legal system and of the country's very identity. The importance of realizing those rights had been highlighted by recent and ongoing crises, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which had affected the most vulnerable people in society most of all. Human dignity and sustainable development could only be effectively guaranteed by respecting the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of all rights. The Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, which had been held in Paris in June 2023, had laid the groundwork for a new international financial system under which no country would have to choose between reducing poverty and combating climate change or preserving biodiversity.
3. The right to social protection was enshrined in the Constitution, and more than half of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) was redistributed, mostly in the form of social assistance, which included health care, education, retirement pensions and occupational training. France had one of the world's most generous social assistance systems and the Government was committed to promoting social solidarity and effective equality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. The Government's social solidarity and equality policies had been adapted to respond to economic, social and environmental emergencies and long-term challenges. They took into account the political, social and cultural diversity of all French citizens throughout the world, and the President's recent trip to New Caledonia had demonstrated the Government's desire to engage in ongoing discussions on the status of the overseas departments and regions with their inhabitants.
5. France remained committed to combating all forms of discrimination in accordance with the Covenant and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and implemented an inclusive public policy. The President had declared gender equality and combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to be a national priority during his two successive terms of office. On 8 March 2023, an interministerial gender equality plan had been launched for the period 2023–2027 to combat violence, promote women's health, ensure equality in the workplace, foster economic empowerment and create a culture of equality. The third National Plan to Combat Racism, Antisemitism and Origin-related Discrimination had been introduced for the period 2023–2026 and measures had been adopted in 2018 to address the situation of members of the Roma community who lived in settlements in precarious conditions. The Government intended to phase out informal settlements, promote social and professional integration, protect children and provide alternative housing. Efforts had been stepped up to protect the rights of older persons, combat ageism and ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities were considered in all public policies.
6. In 2018, a national strategy on preventing and combating poverty had been introduced to guarantee equal opportunities for all persons from a young age; realize the fundamental rights of children; provide guaranteed training for all young people; make social rights more accessible, fairer and more conducive to employment; and provide support in finding work. The most recent review of the strategy, in October 2021, had revealed great progress, although much remained to be done. From 2024, the Solidarity Pact would replace the strategy, doubling the resources allocated to combating poverty in order to prevent and correct structural inequalities, provide an urgent response and ensure a fair ecological transition.

7. A 2017 law upholding an enforceable right to housing for all persons legally residing in France formed the basis of the Government's housing policy. Addressing homelessness on the basis of the key principles of unconditional access to accommodation and the right to housing for all was a priority. More than 440,000 homeless persons had been rehoused under the "Housing First" plan between 2017 and 2022. The second plan had been officially launched in June 2023, with funding of €5 million over the next five years.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic had put the national health system to the test. As in many countries, exceptional temporary measures limiting certain individual freedoms had been introduced under parliamentary oversight. Since the start of the pandemic, France had regularly published updates on the health situation while taking care to respect citizens' personal data. The authorities had made every effort to keep children in schools and considerable steps had been taken to help the economic sectors affected by the crisis and alleviate the burden on workers and their families.

9. The Government had adopted concrete measures to combat youth unemployment and help young people join the labour market. A law had been passed in 2019 to alleviate the impact of social and economic inequality on young people, and a platform of services called the "Culture Pass" had been launched to make cultural activities more accessible. In 2019, the Children's Pact had been introduced to support parents, combat all forms of violence against children, ensure respect for children's rights and better respond to children's basic needs.

10. France had advocated for the international recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. At the national level, the Government had allocated an additional €10 billion to environmental planning in the 2024 national budget as part of measures to address the climate emergency in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

11. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would appreciate updated information on the training provided to legal professionals on economic, social and cultural rights. She wondered how awareness of the provisions of the Covenant and the possibility of lodging individual complaints was raised among civil society organizations throughout French territory, and whether there were any national or regional court decisions related to the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights. She wished to know whether the State party had acted on the recommendations that had been issued by the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions following the reaccreditation of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights in 2019 and what steps had been taken to implement recommendations issued by the Commission, especially as pertained to economic, social and cultural rights.

12. She would be interested to learn what concrete measures and policies had been envisaged to address gaps between metropolitan France and the overseas territories in terms of access to and enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights; whether the State party intended to apply the Revised European Social Charter and the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a System of Collective Complaints in the overseas territories; what short- and long-term measures had been adopted to deal with the recurring problem of access to water in Guadeloupe and Mayotte; what data was available to explain the higher poverty rate in the overseas territories compared to mainland France; and what specific measures had been taken to ensure appropriate care for unaccompanied minors in the overseas territories. It would be helpful to know how the Government planned to evaluate its measures to combat social exclusion and poverty.

13. She wondered what measures the State party would take to implement the Paris Administrative Court decision of 14 October 2021, which required the State to repair the environmental damage caused by the climate crisis; whether there were any more ambitious measures planned to combat climate change and biodiversity loss; what measures were being considered in order to provide sustainable drinking water to populations residing in the overseas territories, especially the French West Indies and Mayotte; and what steps would be taken to implement the various measures announced by the Government to eliminate the risk of chlordecone exposure. She would be interested to hear the delegation's opinion on the

potential adoption by the Council of Europe of a legally binding instrument on the right to a healthy environment.

14. She wished to know what measures France would take in the light of the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 21 September 2023, in which the Court had found that the French Code on Entry and Residence of Foreigners and the Right of Asylum, as recently amended, did not conform to European Union law. She wondered what measures had been introduced to ensure that the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights were applied to the financial sector, in view of reports of an attempt to exclude the sector from the due diligence requirement under a future European Union directive on corporate sustainability due diligence. It would be useful to have an estimate of the total amount of official development assistance allocated in 2023. She wished to know whether that amount was in line with the target of 0.61 per cent of gross national income for that year and, if not, what had prevented the target from being achieved.

The meeting was suspended at 10.40 a.m. and resumed at 10.45 a.m.

15. **A representative of France** said that her country was one of only a few that had accepted all the provisions of the Revised European Social Charter and the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a System of Collective Complaints. Two training courses on international law, including the Covenant, were available at the National School for the Judiciary. During their initial training, all students completed a six-week internship at ministries or institutions such as the International Institute of Human Rights, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs or the Office of European and International Criminal Negotiation within the Ministry of Justice, during which they learned about the application of the Covenant and other international treaties and conventions. Every academic year, approximately a quarter of students also completed a three-week placement at judicial training schools abroad or international courts. Since the Covenant was addressed in the main oral examination for regional lawyer training centres, all lawyers had a good understanding of the Covenant and how it was applied. As soon as they were issued, all decisions and recommendations made by the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights were circulated to the Ministry of Justice and all courts.

16. **A representative of France** said that consultations had been held with local authorities and citizens of the overseas territories in 2022 to improve the application of government measures in the territories, to overcome barriers to development and to meet the specific needs of each territory. On 18 July 2023, following a meeting of the Interministerial Committee for the Overseas Territories, 72 such measures had been proposed to transform economies; to improve everyday life by addressing vulnerabilities; to provide better support for children, young persons and students; to guarantee that necessary adaptations for the overseas territories would be considered under all new government policy; and to adapt equipment and infrastructure to the specific challenges of the overseas territories. Within the coming year, a further meeting of the Interministerial Committee would be held to ensure that progress was being made on those measures.

17. The administration of each overseas territory, rather than the State, was responsible for ensuring access to water. Following delays in ensuring that access, a water management plan had been adopted in 2016, allocating €200 million for Mayotte and €100 million for Guadeloupe. A plan to address chlordecone pollution in Guadeloupe would also be adopted; however, only five of the over thirty samples taken over the past year had shown chlordecone levels above the regulatory limit, and restrictions on water usage had been put in place in each of those cases, particularly targeting pregnant women and young children. Some 80,000 litres of water had been delivered to Mayotte, and the Government was developing long-term measures to respond to the drought and other effects of climate change affecting the region.

18. **A representative of France** said that regular informal meetings were held between the Interministerial Delegation to Combat Racism, Antisemitism and Hatred of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons and the Secretary-General of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. The Delegation submitted contributions for the Commission's annual report and evaluated the impact of new public policy. Recommendations issued by the Commission were incorporated into national plans that the

Delegation developed every three years in consultation with associations active in the field, government ministries and the Commission.

19. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that the Commission also regularly audited and contributed to international policy enacted by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

20. **A representative of France** said that the 2022 annual report on the implementation of the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty for the period 2018–2022 had noted difficulties in measuring the Strategy’s impact due to, for example, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Social Affairs Inspectorate produced regular reports on anti-poverty and social exclusion agreements signed with local authorities. The new Solidarity Pact, for the period 2023–2027, prioritized improved governance and coordination between different actors. France was committed to the evaluation of anti-poverty and social exclusion policies within the European Union, in line with the objective of reducing the number of people living in poverty by 2030.

21. **A representative of France** said that the 21 September 2023 decision, No. 145/2023, of the Court of Justice of the European Union, on border controls, was being considered by national courts and work was under way to implement the provisions set out therein at the country’s borders. As one of the main receiving countries of asylum-seekers in Europe, France respected its commitments in respect of non-refoulement and did everything possible to provide support for migrants, particularly at the border in Calais. The non-governmental organization France terre d’asile provided assistance to minors seven days a week. In the Pas-de-Calais region, shelter had been provided for 7,496 migrants in 2022, and a further 2,550 between January and September 2023.

22. France guaranteed unconditional access to education for all migrant children. New training for institutional actors on asylum procedures for unaccompanied minors had been developed by the Ministry of the Interior and Overseas France, the French Red Cross and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In 2022, 341 asylum applications, or 3.6 per cent of all asylum applications, had come from unaccompanied minors. The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons had assigned points of contact for unaccompanied minors and protection officers who were trained in specialist interview techniques and the specific vulnerabilities of unaccompanied minors.

23. **A representative of France** said that, following the decision of the Paris Administrative Court of 14 October 2021, requiring the State to take any necessary measures to get back on track to the trajectory set out in the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Council of State had convened a hearing in March 2023, attended by the Ministry for Ecological Transition, the organizations which had brought the initial complaint and the High Council on Climate. The Council of State had recognized the State’s efforts to reduce emissions by 40 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 and had noted that carbon emissions in France had fallen by an average of 1.9 per cent each year between 2019 and 2023. It had, nevertheless, considered that accelerated efforts were still needed in order to meet the State’s commitments under the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal and had set a deadline of June 2024 for the Prime Minister to present the policy aimed at meeting those commitments and other progress made in the energy and agriculture sectors. France was a member of the group of 10 countries working in the context of the Council of Europe to establish a binding legal instrument to guarantee the right to a healthy and sustainable environment.

24. **A representative of France** said that France supported the application of the draft European Union corporate sustainability due diligence directive to all business sectors, including the financial sector, and considered it important to have a legal mechanism in line with international norms, including the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct. The OECD National Contact Point raised awareness of the Guidelines and other international norms within the country. France had participated in updating the Guidelines and, in February 2023, had co-chaired an OECD ministerial meeting on responsible business conduct. France also supported discussions in the United Nations on the establishment of a legally binding instrument on business and human rights and was a member of the friends of the Chair of the open-ended

intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights.

25. **The Chair** said that she wished to know whether impact assessments had been conducted of the State party's bilateral and multilateral agreements to ensure that they were in line with the provisions of the Covenant. In the light of the Committee's statement on universal affordable vaccination against coronavirus disease (COVID-19), international cooperation and intellectual property (E/C.12/2021/1), she would also like to know whether any new such agreements signed by the State party established more restrictive conditions than those required by the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and whether pharmaceutical companies were urged to stop practices such as data exclusivity and patent extensions that impeded access to affordable health care in the global South.

26. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know what measures the State party planned to take to bring the legal definition of rape and ill-treatment into line with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, to ensure justice and adequate care for victims of sexual violence and to prevent femicide and domestic violence against children. He wondered what measures were envisaged to meet objectives with regard to sexual education and to guarantee equal and effective access to contraception and abortion services across the country, including by financing abortion clinics.

27. He was eager to learn how the State party ensured a multidimensional focus in efforts to combat poverty. He wished to know what methods the State party used to follow up on recommendations from human rights treaty bodies, special rapporteurs and the universal periodic review, including any national follow-up mechanism.

28. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that he wondered how, in the context of free trade agreements between France and other Mediterranean countries, the provisions stipulating the foundational nature of human rights and the principle of democracy were applied. If there was a conflict between the State party's obligations under the Covenant and its obligations as a member of European institutions, which would take precedence?

29. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he would like to know how the impact of Act No. 2017-399 concerning the duty of care of parent and subcontracting companies, had been assessed, especially given that the first case in which it had been invoked had been dismissed, and whether the judiciary had received training on the Act. He wished to know if a second national action plan on business and human rights would be implemented and how the State party had achieved targets set out in the first national action plan, of 2017, to increase requirements for the financial sector.

30. **Mr. Windfuhr** (Country Task Force) asked whether the State party had plans to adopt a climate adaptation policy or plan, how any such policy or plan would affect different groups and how its impact would be assessed.

31. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would be interested to know whether the State party planned to promote comprehensive debt restructuring, proposed by the United Nations Development Programme to ensure that the most debt vulnerable countries had sufficient resources to adopt climate adaptation and mitigation measures, within the international financial institutions and multilateral forums to which it was party. She also wished to hear the State party's position with regard to the decision to extend the limits on intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines, introduced by the World Trade Organization in July 2022, to apply also to diagnostic equipment and medical treatments for the disease.

32. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know what measures had been taken in the light of the 2022 report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which had shown that France had one of the highest levels of regional inequalities in Europe and that they had increased over the previous two years.

33. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** said that she would welcome clarification on why the Optional Protocol to the Covenant was not being invoked, despite comprehensive training being provided to legal professionals on its provisions.

34. **A representative of France** said that efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence against women had increased in response to the rising number of cases. In 2018, the criminal offence of sexual contempt, referring to sexual comments or behaviours against a person's dignity or that were intimidating, hostile or offensive, had been created; campaigns had been carried out to raise awareness that such behaviours were unacceptable. Legislation introduced in 2019 provided for stops on request on public transport at certain times of day, to address concerns for women's safety. Coordination between the police, the gendarmerie, social services and hospitals had been improved to facilitate the reporting and lodging of complaints of sexual violence. Training had been provided on the subject and specific provisions had been made for persons with disabilities and within sports.

35. **A representative of France** said that, in addition to an existing charter and a code of ethics that ensured that crimes could be reported easily and that the police engaged with victims in a respectful and attentive manner, two training courses had been introduced to help improve the treatment of victims in police stations and gendarmeries, instructing officers in public-facing roles on how to deal with members of the public. A directive had also been adopted in 2016 relating to the personalized assessment of victims and their rights.

36. Investigators interviewing minors who claimed to be victims of violence received specialized training. One 30-hour module dealt with the psychological and technical aspects of interviewing child victims while another, lasting 27 hours, covered sexual offences against minors and domestic violence. The Investigative Interview Protocol developed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development had also been implemented.

37. Lastly, Act No. 2018-703 of 3 August 2018 on Strengthening Measures to Combat Sexual and Gender-based Violence made the presence of minors an aggravating circumstance for such offences, considering them victims if they witnessed domestic violence.

38. **A representative of France** said that, in the context of the recently announced Solidarity Pact, emphasis was placed on preventing poverty by breaking down its root causes, putting in place measures from childhood onwards and ensuring that temporary unemployment did not turn into more lasting and structural exclusion from the labour market.

39. **A representative of France** said that government action had helped house 440,000 homeless people since 2017, 60 per cent of them moving directly into social housing and 40 per cent being provided with intermediate solutions. While the aim was to move people into long-term housing, France was nevertheless continuing to provide temporary lodgings for those in need as part of the Government's wider plan to combat poverty, accommodating more than 200,000 people, including large numbers of migrants, in such facilities each day.

40. **Mr. Bonnafont** (France) said that France was committed to engaging with the issues of climate change, adaptation and common but differentiated responsibilities; at the June 2022 Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, the President of the Republic had invited attendees to discuss how the fight against climate change could be combined with ongoing human development and poverty-reduction policies. The effort would require international measures, including the intervention of development banks and the effective implementation of commitments made at various Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to finance the greening and decarbonization of the world economy. France was sensitive to the impact of climate change on the issue of debt and was engaged in active discussions on the subject in the context of the Paris Club, noting, in particular, how poor countries, especially those threatened by rising sea levels, were especially vulnerable to global warming, despite the fact that they had not contributed to it.

41. Concerning intellectual property and COVID-19, the Government firmly believed that special measures should apply in the event of a pandemic. Vaccines, medicines and diagnostics relating to COVID-19 should be considered as global public goods and not regulated solely by standard market legislation. The Government backed the talks led by the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization, and believed that it was important to strike the right balance between the need to fund research and the need to provide populations everywhere with access to diagnosis, treatment and vaccines. France was involved in concrete cooperation initiatives to improve the local production of vaccines, treatments and medicines in South America, Africa and Asia.

42. **A representative of France** said that her Government strove to ensure that economic and social rights were taken into account in the common commercial policy of the European Union. During negotiations that preceded the signing of free trade agreements, it worked to ensure that the chapters on trade and sustainable development included conditionalities, as seen in the agreement recently signed with Viet Nam. It also actively supported ongoing reforms of investment protection rules and the investor-State dispute settlement mechanism, as demonstrated by the ambitious position it had adopted in Working Group III (Investor-State Dispute Settlement Reform) of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

43. France had recently announced its withdrawal from the Energy Charter Treaty, which would take effect on 8 December 2023. The decision had been prompted largely by the finding that the Treaty did not sufficiently protect the right of States to introduce their own regulations, particularly where the rights enshrined in the Covenant were concerned, and exemplified the action the Government was prepared to take when it found possible conflicts between its human rights obligations and other commitments.

44. **A representative of France** said that, as the largest country by area in the European Union, France was not immune to shifting regional differences and inequalities. The Government responded to that by ensuring that, although most social policies and principles, including the right to economic support, were governed by national frameworks, a greater portion of the powers governing those policies was now shared and coordinated with local authorities.

45. Abortion had been legal in France since 1975, the procedure was provided at no cost, and women were free to choose the method and place where it was carried out. In March 2023, the President of the Republic had announced his wish to enshrine the right to abortion in the Constitution. Recent efforts had made it possible for anyone, including minors, to obtain information on the subject anywhere in the country, by telephone or via online chat tools. The provisions of Act No. 2022-295 of 2 March 2022 included increasing the time limit for abortions from 12 to 14 weeks; extending the authorization to perform surgical abortions in health-care establishments to midwives; abolishing the previously mandatory reflection period between the informative consultation and the psychosocial interview; and extending to 7 weeks the period during which medically induced abortions outside a health-care establishment were permitted, optionally guided by teleconsultation.

46. **A representative of France** said that the Ministry of Education was fully committed to combating all forms of discrimination in schools, including that based on the sexual orientation or gender identity of pupils. It was conducting its efforts as part of an interministerial framework, in particular under the national plan for equality and against hatred and anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination, taking action through educational activities and civil society collaboration aimed at helping all pupils to acquire the social, psychosocial and civic skills they needed in order to build relationships based on respect for the rights and dignity of each individual. The Ministry was also involved in national campaigns to raise pupils' awareness of their right to protection against all forms of discrimination. In order to build a culture of equality and prevent all forms of rejection and violence based on discrimination, work was being undertaken to understand stereotypes, how they were constructed and how they fuelled prejudice. The initiatives that were under way would be strengthened from the start of the 2024 academic year.

47. **A representative of France** said that, with respect to the Act on the duty of care of companies, French law did not provide for an evaluation of the system by the public authorities. However, since 2020, a detailed report had been published by the Ministry of Economics, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty on the application of the legislation, and two parliamentary reports on the subject containing extensive contributions from government departments had also been published. The country's robust and flexible National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights had been in place since 2018, and the Government was fully committed to negotiating binding standards in that area. Any updates would involve consultations with civil society and the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. As already provided for in French law, the Government supported the strict application to the banking sector of the text of the proposed European Union directive on corporate sustainability due diligence.

48. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would like to know whether the planned integration into the new France Travail scheme of a number of social services, including the government employment centre, Pôle emploi, posed a risk in the interim period to the most vulnerable members of society and what was being done to mitigate the current centre's inefficiencies. He would appreciate an update on the impact of measures that were designed to reduce the use of temporary employment contracts, and wished to know why female and young persons accounted for a high percentage of employees on such contracts.

49. The Committee would appreciate an update on progress made towards the State party's goal of achieving a quota of 6 per cent of employees being persons with disabilities, and information relating to persons with disabilities holding positions in public institutions and positions of seniority. It would also like to know why the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities, especially women, was on the rise; what the main obstacles were to destigmatizing disabilities in the mainstream job market; and what steps the State party was taking to overcome them.

50. It would be useful to learn what strategy had been adopted to facilitate the right to work of older and younger persons, particularly in the overseas territories; how the effectiveness of measures designed to promote their employment was monitored on an ongoing basis; and how effective the measures taken had been in combating discrimination in recruitment against LGBTIQ+ persons and on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity and origin.

51. He would like to know why only 31 per cent of the prison population was employed, despite the fact that prisoners needed funds in order to sustain themselves while incarcerated. In the light of concerns raised by a 2022 study, an update would be appreciated on progress achieved in ensuring that the minimum wage was adequate and that fair compensation was paid for overtime work and work carried out on public holidays.

52. Information about any specific changes planned to address the State party's persistent gender pay gap, which was higher than the European Union average and apparently growing, would be appreciated. He would be grateful for information on the impact of the professional equality index on attempts to reverse the gender pay gap.

53. He would welcome information on planned budgetary measures, and a timetable for their implementation, to ensure that health-care workers and teachers received fair compensation, given that their salaries currently compared unfavourably to those paid in other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

54. He wished to know whether the State party planned to establish a dedicated national mechanism for monitoring trafficking in persons. More information would also be welcome on how effectively victims of trafficking in persons were identified and how their access to remedies was ensured.

55. Noting recent allegations of excessive force being used, including against trade union activists peacefully demonstrating against pension reform, he wondered how the State party planned to ensure that trade union members could freely express their right to freedom of opinion and association without fear of intimidation and reprisal. The delegation's reflections on the implementation of the International Labour Organization Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) would also be welcome.

56. He wished to know what steps the State party was taking to ensure that recent social security reforms would not affect the unemployment insurance of the most vulnerable or marginalized members of society or those living in the overseas territories and how persons with disabilities who experienced periods of uncompensated unemployment were accounted for under the new pension reform.

57. Lastly, he wondered what measures the State party intended to take to mitigate the negative effects of the pension reform on women and on those living in poverty, in the light of reports that the initial impact assessment had found that females would be negatively affected by the changes and that a quarter of the poorest men in France died before reaching 62 years of age.

58. **A representative of France** said that the employment rate was improving overall, including for the most vulnerable groups in society. Policy choices, in particular those made since 2017, were partly responsible for the current low rate of unemployment, and expensive but important measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic had helped prevent temporary difficulties from having a lasting negative impact on people's ability to participate in the labour market. Decisions currently being taken focused on structural issues relating to changes in the economy and the ageing population.

59. A range of measures had been adopted to address recruitment shortages in certain professions, including through adjustments to the skills investment plan. The "One youth, one solution" plan, originally introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided tailored support to more than 240,000 young persons, focusing on improving initial training and promoting apprenticeships; it had succeeded in increasing the number of apprentices to 700,000. Almost all training courses could be undertaken on a work-study basis, and a cultural change had been achieved with regard to training.

60. Success had also been seen in efforts to promote women's participation in the world of work. Companies scoring below 85 out of 100 on the professional equality index for men and women were required to adopt adequate corrective measures or face a fine of up to 1 per cent of their annual wage bill. Grades had been increasing since the index's establishment, and there had been a clear evolution in attitudes among businesses, particularly with regard to women returning from maternity leave. The index would soon be introduced in the public sector and, under an equality plan that would cover the 2023–2027 period, companies with unsatisfactory grades were barred from public procurement. Women also benefited from activities to improve their access to senior decision-making roles, as well as non-legislative measures intended to promote behaviour change, such as an equality mark scheme. The equality plan also addressed gender segregation in occupations; currently just 15 per cent of occupations were truly mixed. Measures had been adopted in the education system aimed at changing opinions and preventing social inequality between men and women.

61. Although the employment rate among older adults remained below the European Union average, it had been increasing for around 20 years. The authorities supported businesses in addressing recruitment challenges by targeting sectors of the population that they had not previously prioritized. The France Travail agency would improve vulnerable persons' integration into the labour market by supporting them in their job search and improving coordination between different elements of the public employment service. The reforms to the unemployment insurance system were intended to guarantee sufficient funding for the system to remain in operation. The pension reforms were designed to ensure equality in pensions in the long term between women and men: in general, women's pensions were 40 per cent less than men's, because of their poorer access to the labour market; the redistributive effect of the reform was therefore intended to benefit women more than men.

62. **A representative of France** said that national public employment policies were applied in the overseas territories. As part of the Government's efforts to improve the youth employment rates in those areas, which were lower than in mainland France, an agreement had been signed with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to appoint teachers to the adapted military service scheme, a six-month voluntary programme that addressed social exclusion, unemployment and illiteracy among young persons in the overseas departments and regions and had recently been extended to Mayotte and French Polynesia. More than 80 per cent of its participants subsequently joined the labour market.

63. **A representative of France** said that, in September 2023, the wages of all 853,700 teachers in the country, whose starting net salary was €2,000 per month, had been reviewed, and each teacher had received an increase of at least €125 per month, with an average raise of €158. Their career path had been improved, and they also had the opportunity to volunteer for short-term assignments, such as providing cover for absent teachers, in return for payment of €1,250 per assignment. The Government had invested a total of more than €7.5 billion in salary increases for teachers in recent years.

64. **A representative of France** said that the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly were guaranteed in the Constitution, and individuals could not be arrested for

merely participating in a demonstration. Organizers were required to provide prior notification of demonstrations with a view to opening a dialogue with the authorities to ensure demonstrators' safety and prevent disturbances of public order. The presence of security forces at demonstrations was principally to protect participants and journalists. The use of force by law enforcement officials was governed by legislation, and the authorities ensured that it was controlled, proportionate, monitored and, in the case of misconduct, sanctioned. All victims of misconduct by law enforcement officials could lodge complaints, including via online platforms. It was not possible to share information about ongoing legal investigations.

65. **Mr. Amarti** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee would welcome an overview of the findings of epidemiological studies and research into lead poisoning in French Guiana, as well as information on the extent of the poisoning and its pathological effects on the health of pregnant women, fetuses and children. He wished to hear details of any specific measures, adopted or planned, to improve the situation of unaccompanied minors, in line with the State party's obligations under international instruments. He wished to know what follow-up had been given to the major reforms intended to resolve serious failings in residential care institutions for older persons, what specific steps had been taken to improve living conditions there, whether those responsible for the failings had received administrative sanctions and whether the matter had been referred to the courts.

66. He would welcome statistics on trends in malnutrition, overweight and obesity, disaggregated by age, and would like to know whether the authorities had adopted a participatory approach to tackling those problems and to what extent families, the education system, media and civil society were involved in food and nutrition education. The Committee would welcome information on specific measures to combat extreme poverty that directly targeted particular suburbs, rural areas, overseas territories and population groups. Given the persistence of the concerns surrounding access to decent housing that the Committee had raised in its previous concluding observations, it wished to know precisely what difficulties the State party was facing in guaranteeing the enjoyment of that right. It would also like to know what was being done to prevent forced evictions from irregular housing and slums and to ensure that such action was taken only as a last resort and in compliance with regulations that protected fundamental rights.

67. While noting the steps taken to ensure decent living conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, he would be interested to hear what measures had been adopted to maintain that progress and to prevent local authorities from cutting water and electricity supplies to informal settlements in overseas departments and regions. He wished to know how the State party intended to resolve the growing problems in the health sector in order to afford access to health care to all persons, without territorial or geographic discrimination. He would also welcome information on health indicators and infant and maternal mortality rates in the overseas territories, particularly in comparison to national rates. Further information was required in relation to reports of worsening working conditions for health-care staff, increasing waiting lists, the refusal of care, abuse in health-care settings and disparities in the exercise of the right to health by persons in different regions and of different socioeconomic backgrounds. He wished to know how recent measures adopted in relation to State-provided medical care had affected its accessibility for foreigners in irregular situations and what barriers hindered access to mental health care for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.

68. **Mr. Abashidze** said that he wished to know whether the reforms to labour law were intended to increase working hours and simplify dismissal procedures. Given the large number of arrests made during protests in recent years, he wondered whether the delegation agreed that dialogue with protest movements was preferable to oppressive measures.

69. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would welcome information on the salaries of health workers. He wished to know whether the State party's high poverty rates were linked to the prevalence of precarious and temporary jobs and whether the Government had examined the gender pension gap.

70. **Mr. Shen** said that he wished to know whether the State party's pension system applied to foreign residents from outside the European Union in exactly the same way as to citizens of France and the European Union.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.